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DE RUEHOS #0231/01 1400811
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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INFO RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA 0379
RHMCSUU/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC
RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DOE FOR GPERSONS, CHAYLOCK
TREASURY FOR DPETERS, RHALL, RABDULRAZAK
COMMERCE FOR KBURRESS
LABOR FOR SHALEY
USDOC FOR 3130/USFC/OIO/ANESA/DHARRIS
STATE PASS USTR FOR LISER, AGAMA
STATE PASS USAID FOR NFREEMAN, GBERTOLIN
STATE PASS OPIC FOR ZHAN, MSTUCKART
STATE PASS TDA FOR LFITTS, PMARIN
STATE PASS EXIM FOR JRICHTER

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: UNIONS COMMENCE PROTEST RALLIES

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On May 13 in Lagos, the Nigerian Labor Congress (NLC) held a protest demanding a higher national minimum wage, reform of the electoral process, and suspension of the planned deregulation of the downstream oil sector. Approximately 1,000 people gathered for the protest, then marched to the office of Lagos Governor Fashola, who endorsed the protest. The GON's warning that it could trigger civil unrest proved unfounded; no incidents of violence were reported and Post contacts say the Nigerian Police were accommodating in stopping traffic and otherwise assisting the protesters' march through Lagos. The NLC plans to present a bill to the National Assembly demanding full implementation of the report of an Electoral Reform Committee established by the GON. The NLC may be willing to take a more activist stance against certain GON policies, but the poor turnout at the Lagos protest suggests it has a long way to go in gathering significant grass roots support. End summary

¶2. (U) On May 13 in Lagos, the NLC commenced the first in a series of planned nationwide protest rallies intended to pressure the GON to address labor's key demands which include a review of the national minimum wage, full implementation of electoral reform measures, and the suspension of GON's plans to deregulate the downstream oil sector. (NOTE: The NLC has announced plans to hold additional protest rallies in the cities of Asaba, Kano, Maiduguri and Abuja in May and June, 2009. End Note.) Led by NLC President Abdulwaheed Omar, hundreds of union members, including leaders of the 29 NLC affiliate unions and those of the Trade Union Congress (another labor federation), marched through major streets in Lagos distributing pamphlets and chanting solidarity songs. Post security and labor contacts estimated the crowd at one thousand and reported that the Nigerian Police accommodated the protesters by stopping traffic during the march. No violence or police-protester confrontations were reported. NLC Assistant General Secretary Denja Yakub told PolSpec on May 13 that the protest march was largely peaceful due in part to an agreement between the NLC and the Nigerian Police that none of the two parties should engage in acts that could lead to breach of peace.

¶3. (U) The protest started with a rally at the National Stadium in on the Lagos mainland during which union leaders took turns lambasting the GON for its alleged failure to tackle the country's economic woes. After the rally, protesters marched to Governor Babatunde Fashola's (Action Congress-AC) office in the Ikeja area of Lagos. Union leaders again took turns articulating the NLC's major

demands. Governor Fashola told the protesters that he supported their demands, especially the call for the review of the national minimum wage. He questioned, however, if that review will materialize given the present state of the economy. Fashola regretted that despite Nigeria's enormous human and material resources, the country is unable to adequately provide for the needs of its citizens. He congratulated the workers for holding a peaceful protest and urged them to be reasonable in their demand and negotiation for better wages.

¶4. (U) In a speech during the May 13 protest rally, NLC President Omar, said that the Congress will present a bill to the National Assembly urging the full implementation of the report of an Electoral Reform Committee (ERC) established by the GON in August 2007 to look at reforming the electoral process after the flawed national election earlier that year. (Note: The ERC submitted its report to the GON in December 2008. The NLC and several civil society and opposition groups have criticized the GON's response to the report which waters down many of the ERC recommendations. The groups also questioned GON right to tamper with the ERC report before presenting it to the National Assembly. End note). On May 14, Owei Lakemfa, NLC Information Secretary, told PolSpec that the NLC will seek public support for its proposed bill on the electoral reform. He said the NLC will embark on a mobilization drive to collect 20 million signatures from Nigerians who are opposed to the GON tinkering with the ERC report.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: Generally perceived as weaker since the exit of its firebrand President Adams Oshiomhole, now Governor of Edo State, we suspect the NLC is trying to re-acquire its popularity among unions by stepping up its public rhetoric and championing economic

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and political demands on behalf of the ordinary people. However, it's not clear whether the NLC's publicity campaign will turn this rhetoric into mass mobilization; the turnout for the protest was poor despite recent fuel shortages that have brought to light to many average Nigerians the ineffectiveness of the Federal Government. End Comment.